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Despite current emphasis on racial problems, few books present honestly the Negro experience in the United States. Adolescents' and children's books portraying Negroes in realistic situations have increased over the past two decades, but they comprise only 1% of the total output of books for young people. Textbooks that include Negroes or Negro culture are few. In recent years, some attempt has been made to integrate reading primers, but most history texts are still "disappointingly full of misstatements, omissions, and bias." To remedy this situation, publishers should actively encourage new books by and about Negroes that candidly present contemporary life. Also, teachers can help emphasize Negro experience through creative teaching. A semester's "exploration of soul," the reading of Negro literature, or the writing of a term paper on racial problems can all contribute to a better understanding of the Negro's, and conversely the white man's, history and role in America. (Many books involving Negroes are cited throughout the article.) (LH)

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The Soul of Learning

Dorothy Sterling

Author
Rye, New York

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I have been invited to talk to you because I am, presumably, an expert on books for young people on Negro life and history. That being the case, I ought to tell you how I got to be an expert. I hope it will be a warning to all of you.

Last summer, I received a letter asking me to appear as a witness before the House Committee on Education and Labor. The Committee was holding hearings on the treatment of minority groups in text and library books used in the nation's schools. Its members wanted to hear my views, experiences, and recommendations. When I read the letter, I thought they had made a mistake. I was even surer of it after I learned that the others who were testifying included the Commissioner of the U. S. Office of Education, presidents of publishing companies, editors, superintendents of schools, librarians, and representatives of a Harlem parents' group.

I am not now and have never been an editor, a teacher, or a librarian. I haven't even been a member of the PTA for many years. Nevertheless, although I felt like an imposter, I couldn't resist the chance to fly to Washington to testify.

I wrote what I hoped would be a stirring statement about the truth gap in children's literature that prevented both Negro and white youngsters from learning the real facts of American history and life. For a few days I had Walter Mitty-like fantasies of arousing Congress —and indeed the nation—to action. Reality was somewhat different. Only two or three Congressmen were actually in the committee room when I read my statement, and the television cameramen were busy elsewhere. When I finished, the acting chairman thanked me politely. *Publishers' Weekly* carried a couple of lines, and that was that.

Months later I received the record of the hearings, a massive eight-hundred-page volume which included my five pages of testimony. I never finished reading this tome and probably never will. Then this spring I received a telephone call from Dr. Virginia Burke, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, asking me to speak to you about the books available for young people that concern the Negro. Again I protested that I had no overview of the field and was really only

Editor's Note: This article is the text of a speech given at the NDEA Institute in English held at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, in the summer of 1967.

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familiar with my own books. She replied, "But I read your statement to the House Education and Labor Committee." I was so touched to find that somebody had read the statement that I did not have the heart to disillusion Dr. Burke. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how I became an expert.

I have had a general impression, which perhaps you share, that there has been an outpouring of books about Negroes for young people. The impression has certainly been bolstered by an outpouring of book lists. In Erwin Salk's handy *Layman's Guide to Negro History* (McGraw-Hill), he notes more than a dozen bibliographies prepared by public libraries in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, by the American Friends Service Committee, the American Jewish Committee, etc. While doing my homework for this confrontation, I discovered several others, including two that I think you'll find particularly useful: "Books by and about the American Negro," selected by Young Adult Librarians at the Countee Cullen Branch of the New York Public Library, and "Bibliography of Materials by and about Negro Americans for Young Readers," prepared by Atlanta University, for the U. S. Office of Education.

But aside from the lists, what about the books themselves? Are there enough books—and enough good books—that present honestly the Negro experience in the United States?

Thirty years ago—and indeed for a long time before that—books about Negroes were, to borrow a phrase from Hollywood, box-office poison. There were exceptions, of course. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold well. A century after its publication, Ralph Ellison won a National Book Award for *Invisible Man* (Random House). In between a handful of Negro writers managed to break into print.

In an article titled, "Uncle Remus, Farewell," Arna Bontemps tells of haunting the public library in Los Angeles when he was a youngster, seeking a recognizable reflection of himself and his world. "What I found was of cold comfort, to say the least," he writes. "Nothing more inspiring than *Our Little Ethiopian Cousin* was on the shelves, and I read almost every book in the room to make sure. Moreover, *Our Little Ethiopian Cousin* was not me and his world was not mine."

Two decades later, when his children were growing up, all he could locate for them was *The Pickaninny Twins*. Trying to provide them with something less damaging, he began to write children's books with Negro characters and themes. In the thirties he had the field almost to himself. His first book, *You Can't Pet A Possum*, published in 1934, was marred by stereotyped illustrations, but he continued with *Sad-Faced Boy*, *Lonesome Boy*, *The Fast Sooner Hound* (all Houghton Mifflin) and others. In addition to fiction, he edited *Golden Slippers* (Harper), an anthology of Negro poetry for young people, wrote *We Have Tomorrow* (Houghton), a book of biographies, and *The Story of the Negro* (Knopf).

Langston Hughes collaborated with Bontemps on *Popo and Fifina*, a story with a Haitian setting, and prepared a collection of his own poetry for young people, *The Dream Keeper* (Knopf). Then Jesse Jackson came along with some boys' stories: *Call Me Charley* (Harper) and *Anchor Man* (Harper), Ellen Tarry wrote *My Dog Rinty* (Viking), about a boy and his dog in Harlem, and Ernest Crichlow and Jerrold Beim collaborated on *Two Is a Team* (Harcourt), the first "integrated" picture book, and for a long time the only one.

IN 1947, Shirley Graham won an award for the "best book combatting intolerance in America" with *There Was Once a Slave* (Messner), and thousands of people encountered Frederick Douglass

for the first time. I know, because I was one of those people. With my children, I continued to read her groundbreaking string of biographies—of Phillis Wheatley, Benjamin Banneker, Jean Baptiste du Sable, George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington. I remember listening to a radio adaptation of her *Story of Phillis Wheatley* (Messner) with a Negro friend. My friend burst into tears during the program. "Why didn't somebody tell me about this?" she sobbed.

In addition to these Negro authors, a small number of white writers—people like Marguerite de Angeli, Adele DeLeeuw, Florence Means, Hope Newell (I think they're all white)—began to tackle the problems of prejudice and explore Negro history. In 1951 Elizabeth Yates won the Newbery Medal for *Amos Fortune, Free Man* (Dutton), a biography of a slave in eighteenth-century New England who earned his freedom. It's a well-written, carefully researched book, but I was a bit suspicious about the thinking behind the award. Almost until the end, Amos Fortune kept saying "No, I'm not ready for freedom—don't give it to me yet." I couldn't help wondering if his humility wasn't a part of the book's appeal. However, it is described enthusiastically in the Atlanta University bibliography, so perhaps I'm wrong. Still, if I were a teacher in a ghetto school, I wouldn't put it on my reading list.

AROUND the time of the Supreme Court decision on school integration there was a flurry of interest in books about Negroes. Gwendolyn Brooks published her *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* (Harper), Langston Hughes wrote *Famous American Negroes* (Dodd) and *Famous Negro Music Makers* (Dodd). Emma Gilders Sterne revived the Amistad case in *The Long Black Schooner* and followed this with a biography of Mary McCleod Bethune. I wrote *Freedom Train, The Story of Harriet Tubman* (Doubleday) and a year later came Ann Petry's excellent biography, *Harriet Tubman: Conductor of the Underground Railroad.*

The flurry didn't last long. The white South, you will remember, soon reacted to the Supreme Court with a loud "*Never!*" This was the period when White Citizens Councils mushroomed, when the Klan was revived, and southern librarians were attacked if they displayed a copy of Garth Williams' *The Rabbits' Wedding* (Harper), a picture book describing the marriage of a black rabbit and a white rabbit.

I can speak at first hand about these years. In 1955 I went to South Carolina to work on a biography of Robert Smalls, a slave who became a Civil War hero and, later, a Congressman from South Carolina. The reconstruction period, as it emerged from my research, was totally at variance with the then cherished notion of "the tragic era." When my editor read the manuscript of *Captain of the Planter* (Doubleday), she was frankly reluctant to publish it. It was one thing to write about Harriet Tubman who fought against slavery. By 1955 even White Citizens Council members admitted that slavery was wrong. But to tell the often brutal, truly tragic story of Negro disfranchisement and the birth of Jim Crow was something else again. All southern markets would be closed to the book, and she wasn't at all sure about northern ones. Fortunately for me, she sent the manuscript to Arna Bontemps for his opinion, and he was so enthusiastic that it was finally published. Although it has never been a best seller, it is still in print. In fact, it is now on the list of books approved for schools by the South Carolina State Department of Education!

After I finished *Captain of the Planter*, I traveled through the mid-South to talk with the Negro and white children who were entering integrated schools for the first time. Myron Ehrenberg, a photog-

rapher, accompanied me and together we turned out *Tender Warriors*, a picture and text report of the unbelievably brave young people who were walking through screaming mobs to go to school. The text consisted largely of the students' own words, along with interviews with their parents. It was really a moving little book and the first thing of its kind. Few people were interested, however, and it soon went out of print.

I mention it now only to tell you of a curious incident connected with it. *Tender Warriors* was published by Hill & Wang in 1958. Months before its publication, the publishers were informed by the U. S. Information Agency that the book was disapproved for export under the informational media guaranty program. This is the program that guarantees dollars instead of francs, marks, etc. to U. S. publishers who export books. Without the guarantee, of course, it's scarcely worthwhile to attempt to sell a book overseas. The Hill & Wang people were sufficiently piqued about the rejection of a book before it had been read that they pursued the matter further. In reply to a series of letters, the U. S. Information Agency informed them that the disapproval was based on the description of the book in their catalogue. Therefore, when the book finally appeared a copy was sent to the clearance officer at the Information Agency for re-review. His answer came promptly: "We regret to inform you that this publication is not eligible for export under the informational media guaranty program." No reason was ever forthcoming. Was the book disapproved because of its subject matter? Your guess is as good as mine. However, I think the incident sheds some light on the national mood in the late '50s.

Tender Warriors was intended for adults and young adults, but I was so emotionally involved with the children I had met in the South that I went on to write *Mary Jane* (Doubleday), a fictional account of a Negro girl's first year in an integrated school. My editor at Doubleday winced when I told her about it.

"Couldn't you set it in the North?" she asked.

I couldn't. I wrote it as I saw it and, after some backing - and - forthing, Doubleday published it in 1959. At a cocktail party that fall—sometimes you learn more at a party than at an editorial conference—a salesman told me that although he liked some of my books he wouldn't dare enter a bookstore in Chicago with a book that had a picture of a Negro on its jacket. But this story has a happy ending, for *Mary Jane* won a few awards, sold well in 1959, and is selling better now, even in Chicago. And, as a footnote for the U. S. Information Agency, it has been published in seven European countries.

I was lucky. My publishers were willing to gamble. Other writers were not as fortunate. The same year that *Mary Jane* appeared, an acquaintance wrote a far less controversial book about a Negro child visiting a white family for a Fresh Air Fund vacation. Her book was already in galleys when the sales department heard about it. They were so dead set against it that she was obliged to revise it, transforming the Negro youngster into a white one. At still another publishing house, an editor reports that during the '50s she brought out three books in which Negroes appeared. "The books won favorable comment," she said, "but the effect on sales was negative. Customers returned not only these titles but all stock from our company. This meant an appreciable loss and tempered attitudes toward further use of Negro children in illustrations and text."

Of course, there wasn't a total whiteout of books about Negroes during these years. Arna Bontemps wrote *Frederick Douglass: Slave, Fighter, Freeman* (Knopf); Henrietta Buckmaster, *Flight to Freedom* (Crowell); Jean Gould, *That Dunbar Boy* (Dodd); Mimi Levy,

Corrie and the Yankee (Dodd); etc. But no one was holding out a carrot or swinging a stick to induce authors and editors to enter the field.

THEN came the student sit-ins and freedom rides, the Birmingham bombing, the Civil Rights Acts, the struggle against *de facto* segregation in the North. In every section of the country there has been a growing awareness of civil rights and a growing demand for picture books, stories, biographies, history about Negroes. We have seen a number of severely critical studies of the history textbooks used in schools, as well as blistering attacks on the Dick-and-Jane type readers that show only middle-class white suburban families.

I won't pretend to be an expert on primers but, from newspaper stories and an NAACP study on "Integrated School Books," I gather that Dick and Jane have been making new friends—and some of them are black. The Bank Street Readers series, the Skyline series, and others show children in urban as well as suburban settings and dark faces appear increasingly in spellers, science, and math books. Some of these changes are a bit mechanical. At the Education and Labor Committee hearings I learned of one textbook publisher who instructed his artist to make every tenth person a Negro in his illustrations. Another temporarily solved his marketing problems with three editions of a primer. In one, all the children portrayed are white. In the second, some are brown. In the third, the children are white, but the teachers pictured wear nuns' garb. One edition for the South, one for urban schools in the North, one for parochial schools!

The picture is far less bright in the field of history texts. Adult readers can find new interpretations of the slavery period, the anti-slavery movement, reconstruction, and so on. A little of this "new history" which should be more correctly called "true history," has begun to trickle down to school texts. A study made by Irving Sloan for the American Federation of Teachers shows that generally the history texts of 1966 are an improvement over 1956. But not much. Some now have inserts describing the death of Crispus Attucks at the Boston Massacre. Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass are mentioned. Readers are told that 200,000 Negro soldiers fought in the Civil War. There is a slightly more balanced but still woefully inadequate treatment of reconstruction, and a few books have a supplement covering the civil rights movement and the Negro today. Among the thirteen books Sloan analyzed, only one, *Land of the Free* (Crowell) by John Hope Franklin, John W. Caughey, and Ernest R. May, comes close to presenting the "true history." And the picture is even darker than Sloan paints it because schools don't buy new textbooks every year. Many are continuing to use the same old distorted ones. I went through the textbook assigned to the seniors in the high school in my community—it's called *History of a Free People* by the way—and found it disappointingly full of misstatements, omissions, and bias.

As you undoubtedly know, textbook publishing is a multi-billion dollar industry. Each text represents a large capital investment so that asking a text publisher to rewrite a history book is a little like asking General Motors to design a new car. Trade books, however, are issued in much smaller editions. Because there is less money riding on an individual book, trade publishers are able to respond more rapidly to new ideas, new programs, new audiences.

HOW has the civil rights revolution affected the output of trade books? Arna Bontemps probably has grandchildren by now. When they go to the library will they be able to find a reflection of themselves and their world?

As I said earlier, I have had the im-

pression of a flood of books about Negroes in recent years. Ezra Jack Keats won the Caldecott Award for *The Snowy Day* (Viking) and has also done *Whistle for Willie* (Viking), both picture books about black children. Fiction for somewhat older readers includes *South Town* (Follett) and *North Town* (Crowell) by Lorenz Graham, stories of a Negro boy; *Brady* (Coward) by Jean Fritz, an underground railroad tale; and Nat Hentoff's *Jazz Country* (Harper). *Hurricane: The Story of a Friendship* by Dorothy Ball tells of the friendship between a white boy and a Negro boy in Florida. *Roosevelt Grady* (World) by Louisa Shotwell reports on a family of migrant workers. Girls' stories include *Classmates by Request* (Morrow) by Hila Colman and *Whispering Willows* (Doubleday) by Elisabeth Hamilton. By my count there are at least six novels about school integration, including May Justus' *New Boy in School* (Hastings) and Natalie Carlson's *The Empty Schoolhouse* (Harper).

Charlemae Rollins has edited *Christmas Gif'* (Follett), an anthology of stories and poems by and about Negroes. She has also written *Famous American Negro Poets* (Dodd) and *They Showed the Way* (Crowell), brief biographies of forty Negro leaders. Arna Bontemps' *Famous Negro Athletes* (Dodd) is supplemented by Jackie Robinson's and Alfred Duckett's *Breakthrough to the Big League* (Harper), Milton Shapiro's *The Hank Aaron Story*, Larry Klein's *Jim Brown: The Running Back* (Putnam). Other biographies include Edward Clayton's *Martin Luther King* (Prentice-Hall); Harold Felton's *Jim Beckwourth: Negro Mountain Man* (Dodd); and Ann McGovern's *Runaway Slave, The Story of Harriet Tubman* (Four Winds).

Two new biographies of George Washington Carver appeared in the '60s in addition to five published earlier. Is it possible that Carver, like Amos Fortune, has special appeal because of his humility?

In history, Earl Schenck Miers has written *The Story of the American Negro* and Madeline Stratton, *Negroes Who Helped Build America* (Ginn). I covered the Negro experience in America up to 1863 in *Forever Free* (Doubleday) and Milton Meltzer has done a stunning job with his three-volume documentary history, *In Their Own Words* (Crowell). Betty Schechter gives an excellent background report on the nonviolent movement in *The Peaceable Revolution* (Houghton) and Margaret Strachan brings us almost up-to-date with a fictionized account of the 1964 summer in Mississippi in *Where Were You That Year?* (Washburn).

Doubleday's Zenith Books, each written by a Negro historian and a children's book author in collaboration, cover history and biographies of Negroes from the colonial period to 1941. In addition to three books on Africa, they include *Four Took Freedom* by Philip Sterling and Rayford Logan; *Pioneers and Patriots* by Lavinia Dobler and Edgar Toppin, *Time of Trial, Time of Hope* by Milton Meltzer and August Meier, *Worth Fighting For* by Agnes McCarthy and Lawrence Reddick, *The Unfinished March* by Carol Drisko and Edgar Toppin, and *Lift Every Voice*, which I wrote with Benjamin Quarles.

That adds up to forty-two books. I compiled the titles from books I have read, from book reviews and bibliographies. Doubtless I've overlooked some. But even if you double or triple the number, it is certainly not a flood.

Let's play a numbers game for a minute. There were roughly twelve thousand children's trade books issued in the seven-year period from 1960 through 1966. If we say that eighty, perhaps one hundred and twenty, dealt with the Negro past and present in the United States, that means that at best 1 per cent of the total output of books for young people are devoted to the Negro.

Is this possible? Have I made a mistake

in arithmetic? I don't think so. Two years ago Nancy Larrick, former president of the International Reading Association, jolted the publishing world with an article in *Saturday Review* titled "The All-White World of Children's Books." She sent a questionnaire to the seventy members of the Children's Book Council. From sixty-three replies she found that out of 5,206 children's books issued between 1962 and 1964 only 6.7 per cent included a Negro in text or illustrations. Her figure is higher than mine because the questionnaire replies included books that showed Negroes only in illustrations, as well as books about Africa, the Caribbean, etc. When she subtracted these and the histories and biographies she reported that only four-fifths of 1 per cent of the books told a story about American Negroes today.

SINCE it takes a year or two to write a book, and another year before publication, perhaps the situation has changed since her article appeared. Twice a year *Publishers' Weekly* puts out a special Children's Book Number reporting on forthcoming books. Their issue of July 10, 1967, describes the children's books that will be published this fall. I always go through these special numbers with a sinking feeling, afraid that the books I would like to do have already been done by others. I needn't have worried. From the ads and thumbnail descriptions of more than five hundred books I found just fourteen about Negro Americans. And that *really* gave me a sinking feeling.

Four are biographies, two collective biographies, one an anthology of poetry. The fiction includes two sports stories about boys who want to become boxers, one about integrating a school, one about two girls who go from a city slum to a summer camp, and one about a boy living in a mixed neighborhood in Brooklyn. Good enough as far as it goes, but it doesn't go very far, does it?

Only 2.8 per cent of the current output of books for young people are concerned with the most burning issue of our time. When Arna Bontemps' grandchildren go to the library they won't have to read every book on the shelves and find only *Our Ethiopian Cousin.* But they will have to read ninety-seven books before they discover three that speak to them.

And it is not only Negro youngsters who are being deprived. As Nancy Larrick says, "The impact of all-white books upon 39,600,000 white children is probably even worse." How can they understand the news on television and in the newspapers? Increasingly isolated from their darker contemporaries, how well are these white children being prepared for the larger adult world in which they are globally a minority?

I'd like to carry this discussion a step further by asking "Why?" Are editors and authors less liberal, more prejudiced than the rest of American society? Certainly not. Those I know, at least, are probably more concerned, more open to new ideas than the average citizen. Are they then only interested in money? The dollar is a factor, of course. Both writers and publishers must be paid for their efforts. But the economic picture has changed radically since the 1950s—and most radically since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which released millions of dollars to libraries and schools for the purchase of books for the educationally deprived. There's gold in them thar hills now. I doubt if any trade publishers or book salesmen would turn down a reasonably well-written book because it portrayed a Negro.

Then why? President Johnson has said "You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying 'Now you are free to go where you want.' You do not take a man who, for years, has been hobbled by chains, liberate him, and then say, 'you're free to compete with

all the others.' It is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity."

He was speaking of Negroes, but his words could also be applied to editors and writers. You do not take minds that have been hobbled by centuries of racism and say, "Now you're free to write the truth." What is the truth? Most white people and many Negroes don't know. And there's more than that, of course. When you begin to write the truth, you bump into all sorts of obstacles. Consider the rule of the happy or at least upbeat ending. Should we tell the children that in real life people do not always live happily ever after?

I faced this problem when I was writing *Mary Jane* and didn't really solve it properly. I compromised by letting her make one friend in school and ending with the hope that she would make more next year. When the book was published the bright, warmhearted little girl who lives next door asked, "Is it really that bad?" "Much worse," I answered. "Why today's paper tells about the bombing of the home of an eight-year-old boy because he went to a 'white' school." "Oh, don't tell me about it!" she said and ran home.

Should she be told? I think so.

Even more ticklish are the rules of American society. A policeman is a boy's best friend. Is he? Does a black boy in Philadelphia, Mississippi, think that about Sheriff Rainey, accused of conspiring to kill Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman in 1964? Does a boy in Newark or Detroit think so? Not according to what I see in the newspapers.

RECENTLY I've read two books that every high school student should read. One is *Mississippi Black Paper* (Random), published in 1965, with a foreword by Reinhold Niebuhr and an introduction by Hodding Carter III. It consists of the testimony of fifty-seven Negro and white civil rights workers on the breakdown of law and order, the corruption of justice, and brutality of the police in Mississippi. The other is *The Torture of Mothers* by Truman Nelson. Nelson tells, largely through tape-recorded interviews, of the arrest of six Harlem boys for a murder they did not commit, of beatings administered by the police, and of slanted stories in the press. There is plenty of raw material for books for young people here—really raw.

Books that tell it like it is—and nothing less will be acceptable today—must challenge all sorts of hitherto cherished beliefs. You were probably as shocked as I was, a couple of years ago, by the plot to blow up the Statue of Liberty. I'm still not sure there really was such a plot, but think how the Goddess of Liberty welcoming the world's poor and oppressed must look to a Negro teen-ager. When I was growing up, I recited the pledge of allegiance, "with liberty and justice for all," with real emotion. I was not aware—I had no way of learning—that the Goddess of Liberty was saying "But not for you" to large numbers of my fellow citizens. We have to tell young people about this, particularly white youngsters.

History must be completely rewritten, not just revised with supplements tacked on to the end. Seven biographies of George Washington Carver, three of Harriet Tubman, two of Frederick Douglass, one of Benjamin Banneker—it's like a giant jigsaw puzzle with most of the pieces missing. There's a scrap of blue sky, the top of a tree, but you can't even guess what the whole picture looks like.

Where is Paul Cuffee who built up his own fleet of ships in the Eighteenth Century and carried Negroes back to Africa when he couldn't find justice in his home state of Massachusetts? And James Forten, sailmaker for the U. S. Navy and Revolutionary War veteran, who was penning anti-slavery pamphlets as far back as 1812? And Forten's son-in-law,

Robert Purvis, handsome, well-educated, wealthy, who sheltered thousands of escaping slaves? And William Still who kept the records for the Pennsylvania branch of the underground railroad? And black abolitionists like the Remonds and Henry Highland Garnet, William Wells Brown, Alexander Crummell, whom you read about in *Souls of Black Folk*?

I'M out of breath and I'm barely up to the Civil War. Why has so little been written about the twenty-two Negroes who served in Congress during Reconstruction and after? The black Populists? The men and women of the early twentieth century who spoke, wrote, fought for Negro freedom? It's time for young people's biographies of W. E. B. DuBois, A. Philip Randolph, Marcus Garvey.

I can think of a dozen episodes from history that should be written about, not only because they demonstrate Negro courage or the Negro's contribution to American society, but also because they would make darn good stories. And there are hundreds more.

Who will write these books? And who will write about today's young people in urban ghettoes and the rural South?

I believe that publishers are ready to bring out the books. However, they are somewhat in the position of a manufacturer who puts a sticker—a small one—in his window announcing that he is an Equal Opportunity Employer and then says, "But no Negroes have applied." Not many Negroes are likely to apply. The welcome mat has been out for such a short time that they have not had a chance to see it.

Whitney Young of the Urban League has proposed a "more-than-equal" program in which employers seek out qualified Negroes for jobs and train those who lack qualifications. "For more than three hundred years the white American has received preferential treatment over the Negro," he says. "What we ask now is that there be a deliberate and massive attempt to include the Negro citizen in the mainstream of American life." I'm asking editors to make a deliberate and massive effort to seek out Negro writers and manuscripts with Negro themes. By this I don't mean that only Negro writers can do the job. I happen to be hooked on Negro history, and I don't plan to give up my addiction. But from my comfortable suburban home, I cannot write a story about a girl in Harlem or a boy in Lowndes County, Alabama—and doubtless other white authors feel the same way.

I can almost hear rumbles from editorial offices. . . . You can't write books to order. . . . You can't commission books. . . . You'll only get formula books with pat solutions. . . . Nonsense! Books are written to order all the time. Three of my books—not about Negroes—were written because Doubleday salesmen said there was a need for them. I've just completed a book suggested by my editor—and the suggestion, I'm glad to say, was that I write about the civil rights revolution. I am definitely *not* asking for formula books with pat solutions. That's why I believe Negro writers should be sought out and convinced to try their hand at books for young people.

AN organization that feels as I do about this is the Council on Interracial Books for Children, which was founded by a group of children's book writers and children's librarians, along with such concerned citizens as Harry Golden, Benjamin Spock, and Harold Taylor. They are currently sponsoring a contest for the best children's books by Negroes, with $500 prizes for the best manuscript for ages three to six, seven to eleven, and twelve to sixteen.

There are also two Negro organizations turning out reference books. The Negro Heritage Library is planning a twenty volume encyclopedia and has

already issued seven volumes, one a *Negro Heritage Reader for Young People* which reprints folk tales, songs, poetry, and prose by Negro authors. The other books in the series–none too difficult for high school readers–include *Profiles of Negro Womanhood, A Martin Luther King Treasury, The Winding Road to Freedom, Negroes in Public Affairs and Government*, etc. The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History which, for too long a time, was the only group that knew there was such a thing as Negro history, is preparing an International Library of Negro Life and History (Books, Inc.). Their first five volumes cover *Negro Americans in the Civil War, The History of the Negro in Medicine, Anthology of the American Negro in the Theatre, Historical Negro Biographies*, and *The Negro in Music and Art.*

Aside from these, Doubleday is, I believe, the only trade book house that has begun to make the sort of deliberate effort I am suggesting, with its Zenith series which, incidentally, was initiated by a Negro editor. Ordinarily I dislike series books. They tend to be pedestrian and, over the years, to run downhill. The Zenith series is uneven. Some of the books are very good and some only fair. But in this long, hot summer of 1967 wouldn't you rather give a youngster a fair book that tells the truth, instead of a pretty good one about, say, a talking mouse? Let's face it. Not all of the books published each season contain deathless prose–and these books that were written to order stand up very well.

NOW that I've told the publishing industry how to run its business, I have some proposals for teachers. As high school teachers you need not be dependent on the current output of children's books. Many books written for adults can be read by your students. And you can also turn to books of the past, a number of which have been reprinted.

How do you organize this material? A course in American literature with one out of every ten books concerned with the Negro? I think you can be less mechanical and more imaginative.

What I propose is a semester exploration of "soul." Before you raise your eyebrows, hear me out. James Baldwin jolted a lot of us a few years ago when he quoted Negroes as saying "I am not at all sure that I want to be integrated into a burning house. . . . I might consider being integrated into something else, an American society more real and honest–but this? No thank you, man, who needs it?"

A burning house? The fire next time? I remembered his words as I read of the riots in Newark last week. Clearly this was not the fire that Baldwin anticipated because in Newark–as in other cities–Negroes were for the most part immolating themselves. But isn't there at least a symbolic significance in the signs on Negro-owned store windows–"Soul Brother"? To me, they recalled the chapter in Exodus in which the children of Israel smear blood on their door posts so that the Lord will pass over their homes when He smites the Egyptians' first-born.

A white society accustomed to hearing at its own various levels such words as *buddy*, *pal*, *associate*, and the word *friend*, in all of its diluted meanings is startled by the currency of "soul" in the vocabulary of the black ghettoes. Is this only the cant word of a narrow racial sectarianism, or does it express something unique in the Negro experience in America that has allowed Negroes to make special contributions to our country?

To all the whites who have ever spoken of it as "our country" W. E. B. DuBois had this admonition in *Souls of Black Folk* (Peter Smith). "Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our three gifts and mingled

them with yours: a gift of story and song–soft, stirring melody in an ill-harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire two hundred years earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the spirit."

Nor was DuBois the first to perceive this "gift of the spirit." During the Civil War, a reporter for the *Boston Commonwealth* wrote: "It was said long ago that the true romance of America was not in the fortunes of the Indian, nor in the New England character, nor in the social contrast of Virginia planters, but in the story of the fugitive slaves. The observation is as true now as it was before War, with swift, gigantic hand, sketched the vast shadows, and dashed in the high lights in which romance loves to lurk. But the stage is enlarged on which these dramas are played, the whole world now sit as spectators, and the desperation or the magnanimity of a poor black woman has power to shake the nation that so long was deaf to her cries."

TWENTY-FIVE years later, Alexander Crummell was discussing democracy in a speech on "The Race Problem in America." "It is the nation which is on trial," he said. "The Negro is only the touchstone. By this black man she stands or falls. . . . So compact a thing is humanity that the despoiling of an individual is an injury to society. If this nation is not truly democratic then she must die!"

James Weldon Johnson echoed Crummell after the "Red Summer" of 1919 when hundreds of Negroes were killed in a wave of lynchings and race riots. At a protest meeting in Carnegie Hall, Johnson said, "The race problem in the United States has resolved itself into a question of saving black men's bodies and white men's souls."

The "gift of the spirit" and its relation to our democracy became even clearer during the last decade. Listen to Martin Luther King on the student sit-ins:

> These students are not struggling for themselves alone. They are seeking to save the soul of America. They are taking our whole nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the Founding Fathers. In sitting down at lunch counters, they are in reality standing up for the best in the American dream.

And Ralph Ellison in a recent issue of *Harper's*:

> Any people who could endure all of that brutalization and keep together, who could undergo such dismemberment and resuscitate itself, and endure until it could take the initiative in achieving its own freedom is obviously more than the sum of its brutalization. Seen in this perspective, theirs has been one of the great human experiences and one of the great triumphs of the human spirit in modern times, in fact, in the history of the world.

I'm citing these statements simply to suggest clues to the meaning of "soul" as used by Negroes today. Call it "black consciousness' if you prefer, or "Negritude," although I don't think that Cesaire's and Senghor's "Negritude" quite fits the American experience. But let's consider "soul" as a hypothesis and see what reading matter we can bring to the classroom to support it.

I would start by reading the spirituals as poetry. There's a wealth of background material here: DuBois' chapter on "the sorrow songs" in "Souls of Black Folk," Margaret Butcher's *Negro in American Culture* (Knopf), James Weldon Johnson's preface to his *Book of American Negro Spirituals*, and of course, his poem, "Oh, black and un-

known bards." The songs themselves can be found in a number of volumes starting with *Slaves Songs of the United States*, published in 1867 and reprinted by Peter Smith in 1951, John Work's *Negro Songs and Spirtuals*, Miles Mark Fisher's *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (Russell), etc. I have a tin ear so that I won't attempt to discuss them as music but doubtless you can bring recordings into the classroom.

I hope your students will also have time to read of the "discovery" of the spirituals by a sensitive northerner in Thomas Wentworth Higginson's *Life in a Black Regiment* and of their later acceptance by American and European audiences. Arna Bontemps tells this well in *Chariot in the Sky* (Holt), a fictional account of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. And *Colonel of the Black Regiment*, a biography of Higginson written for teenagers by Howard Meyer, has just been published (Norton).

The spirituals lead to work songs and the blues. Again I would consider not only the music but the words, with Margaret Butcher as my guide, and the blues lead so neatly to Langston Hughes' *The Weary Blues* that I would toss chronology aside and move right in on modern Negro poetry. Along with Arna Bontemps' *American Negro Poetry*, Hughes' and Bontemps' *Poetry of the Negro* (Doubleday), Charlemae Rollins' *Famous American Negro Poets* (Dodd), there are also separate volumes of poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, Hughes, Sterling Brown, Countee Cullen, and others.

SOMETIMES one poem is worth a thousand words. Committees will spend months investigating the causes of the riots in Newark when they might have found the answer in eleven lines[1] by Langston Hughes:

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

Another "gift of the spirit," the Negro folk tales, were first written down by Joel Chandler Harris, a southern apologist for slavery. I would not recommend Harris for classroom or out-of-school reading either. While his transcriptions of the folk tales he gathered are accurate enough, his narrator, Uncle Remus, is the prototype of most of the subsequent stereotypes of the good old-fashioned southern (forgive me) darky. At times Uncle Remus says and does things that make Uncle Tom look like a member of Malcolm X's bodyguard.

Folk tales which are more pertinent to the contemporary mood are to be found in the works of Zora Neale Hurston, J. Mason Brewer, and Benjamin A. Botkin. Particularly relevant is the folk figure of John, the clever practitioner of one-upsmanship, during slavery and afterward, against his white adversaries. It was Miss Hurston who first gave John the permanency of print in her writings and J. Mason Brewer also has a fine collection called "John Tales." John is also represented in Hughes' and Bontemps' *Book of Negro Folklore* (Dodd) and Philip Sterling's *Laughing on the Outside* (Grosset) which is subtitled "The intelligent white reader's guide to Negro tales and humor." Both these books include Brer Rabbit and the familiar animal tales as well. The Hughes-Bontemps book retains the original dialect in the stories, while Sterling omits it for the most part.

[1] From *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. Copyright 1951 by Langston Hughes. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc.

FROM folk tales it's only a half-step to Negro humor, certainly an integral part of "soul"—and bearing little resemblance to the utterances of Amos and Andy. *Laughing on the Outside* undertakes to place its examples of humor in a historical framework with simple introductions that you will find helpful. This and Langston Hughes' *Book of Negro Humor* make excellent companions, though with some overlapping.

While talking of Hughes and humor, no reading list would be complete without one or more of his Simple books. From *Simple Speaks His Mind* to *Simple's Uncle Sam* (Hill & Wang), published in 1965, there are five books in which Jesse B. Simple, citizen of Harlem, talks on love, war, politics, and pork chops. All are guaranteed to start the reluctant reader reading. Both the Hughes and Sterling books contain excerpts from Alice Childress' *Like One of the Family*. I particularly recommend *Like One of the Family* which is subtitled "Conversations from a Domestic's Life" for assignment in white schools. It might revolutionize dinner-table conversations in the suburbs.

I just read you a statement that found "the true romance of America" in the story of the fugitive slaves. Hundreds of slaves who escaped wrote or dictated their autobiographies. Unfortunately, few of these are in print or easily accessible in libraries. However, your classes *can* read the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, as well as his stirring *Life and Times*. I look forward to the day when Douglass' *Life and Times* becomes required reading for every high school student in the United States. Those who do not encounter it—white as well as black—are missing a vital part of their heritage.

Another fugitive slave, William Wells Brown, became the first professional Negro writer in the United States. His novel, *Clotel or The President's Daughter*, published in 1853, makes pretty melodramatic reading today, although my daughter found it fascinating when she was in high school and used it for a book report. However, since it is not in print and you are not studying the Negro novel *per se*, I suggest that you skip even the more sophisticated fiction of Charles Chestnutt and come down to today.

In addition to Richard Wright's *Native Son* (Harper) and Ellison's *Invisible Man*, your classes will enjoy Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (Dial), all three of John Killens' novels—*Youngblood* (Trident), *And Then We Heard the Thunder* (Knopf), and *'Sippi* (Trident)—and William Melvin Kelley's *A Different Drummer*. Two excellent anthologies, *American Negro Short Stories*, edited by John Henrik Clarke (Hill and Wang), and *The Best Short Stories Written by Negroes*, edited by Langston Hughes (Little, Brown), have appeared in recent months. There are also *Something in Common* (Hill & Wang), an anthology of Hughes' own short stories, and *Uncle Tom's Children* (Harper), stories by Wright.

In the field of historical novels, Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* will, I hope, soon supplant *Gone with the Wind* on library shelves. Arna Bontemps' *Black Thunder* tells the story of Gabriel who led a slave revolt in Virginia in 1800. Truman Nelson covers the fight against the fugitive slave act in *The Sin of the Prophet* and describes John Brown's early years in *The Surveyor*. Howard Fast's *Freedom Road* (Crown) gives an honest picture of Reconstruction and would be interesting to compare stylistically with Frank Yerby's *The Vixens*, (Pocket Books). Yerby is far and away the best-selling Negro novelist although he does not always choose Negro themes. In *The Vixens*, along with Hollywood-type heroes and heroines, he covers the growth of the Klan, Negro voting, and disfranchisement.

Several plays speak particularly to

youth today: Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* (Random) and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* (Random), James Baldwin's *Blues for Mr. Charlie* (Dial), Langston Hughes' *Five Plays*, Duberman's *In White America* (Houghton), Genet's *The Blacks*, and Ossie Davis' *Purlie Victorious*. The latter has been published by Samuel French in an edition intended for amateur dramatic groups. It's extremely pertinent and very funny. Why not suggest it for next year's high school play?

NOW we come to history. I have a sneaky scheme that will keep the history department from picketing you for invading their jurisdiction. You teach youngsters how to do research and write up their material, don't you? Seems to me that my children spent a lot of time on term papers and a massive "senior thesis," complete with footnotes and bibliography. Why not term papers on the Negro in the North before the Civil War, on the *real* tragedy of Reconstruction, on the origin of Jim Crow? There's readily accessible material in Leon Litwack's *North of Slavery* (University of Chicago), in recent books on Reconstruction by John Hope Franklin, Kenneth Stampp, and Henrietta Buchmaster, and in C. Vann Woodward's *Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Peter Smith).

Out of forty thousand books on the Civil War, only ten report on the Negro's role. Among these ten, however, you can find at least three—Benjamin Quarles' *Negro in the Civil War*, Dudley Cornish's *Sable Arm*, and James McPherson's *The Negro's Civil War*—that high school audiences will find rewarding. Herbert Aptheker's nine hundred-page history, *The Negro People in the United States*, contains material for a dozen senior theses, and Philip Foner's four volumes on *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (International) is also a treasure-trove for researchers.

In addition to writing term papers on history, your students will want to explore the present. Out of dozens of autobiographies, Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (Harper), J. S. Redding's *On Being Negro in America* (Bobbs-Merrill), Langston Hughes' *The Big Sea* (Hill & Wang), and *I Wonder As I Wander* (Hill & Wang), and Dick Gregory's *Nigger* (Dutton) all contribute to an understanding of "soul." And there are innumerable biographies and autobiographies of sports and entertainment figures as well.

Can you think of a more provocative topic for a senior thesis or a debate than a comparison of Martin Luther King's three books and Malcolm X's autobiography? Your classes may also want to look into Fannon's *Wretched of the Earth* (Grove), a discussion of colonialism which has become a best seller among the advocates of Black Power.

I have offered far more than a semester's work, I know, but I have still one more suggestion—for a discussion on what Ossie Davis calls "the racism of the English language." He has listed the dozens of pejorative uses of the word "black"—blackguard, black mark, blackhearted, black sheep, blackball, blacklist, while finding "white" almost universally associated with purity and goodness. To this I would like to add such racist expressions as "Free, white and 21," "mighty white of you," etc.

Can your students dig up quotations or figures of speech which point in the opposite direction? It's not easy. During a blackout the other night—it was really a white power failure—I challenged some of my neighbors. They came up with "the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice," "black velvet," "showing the white feather," "lily-livered." Such word games must be conducted, however, with one clear objective in mind, that is, to change the kind of social, racial, and personal relationships that give the words "black" and "white" their present values.

The fantastically difficult and yet hopeful job that confronts us as teachers and writers is to provide the young with the vision of conciliation, and the frame of mind and intellectual materials which will make conciliation possible. And perhaps I have hit quite by accident, on the significant word of the immediate future —*conciliation*. The concept of "soul," no matter how many ways you define it, expresses the growing Negro reaction against oppression and rejection on one hand, and against assimilation or absorption on the other.

Integration, in the light of Negro experience since 1954, has lost considerable credibility among Negroes, as a goal which is either attainable or desirable. But conciliation remains applicable, not merely as a semantic convenience but as a social process; because it means the coming together of antagonistic equals to resolve their antagonisms on a footing of mutual respect. If this happens, and only *when* it happens, will America stand a chance of becoming "the dream the dreamers dreamed"—

> The land that never has been yet—
> And yet must be—
> The land where *every* man is free.

We are among those who have to help it happen.

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